

Sunday September 27th

Questions Jesus asked Part 3

Luke 6: 27 – 36

Good morning, we come to the 3rd part of our series ‘Questions that Jesus asked’. Today’s question is:

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?”

We are about 3 months away from Christmas! How does that make you feel? Do you love Christmas time? Do you think this year is going to be different? Christmas is an interesting time as it involves many types of lists. A list of food that you need to buy. A list of presents to buy for family both distant and close, and a list for Christmas Cards. I don’t know what your experience is of giving and receiving Christmas cards but when I was at school I would get cards from all sorts of people and I made sure they would get one back in return. It is not long before you look through the cards and work out who hasn’t sent you a card. You say to yourself that you won’t send a card to this person or that person as they never sent you one. Christmas cards became like a competition to give to those who you knew would give back to you.

In a funny way this whole process rather represents life and the way we as human beings tend to act and behave.

People want to be loved, people will be more drawn to those who they connect with in some way. People will hang out with people that share the same beliefs and values. Symbolically they will love and care for those that they will get a card from! Rightly or wrongly, I believe this happens everywhere all over the world. Have a look round Peterborough and see that various groups of people that tend to gather and live by like-minded people, and this could be determined by Class, ethnicity, Religion, language and so on. On a small scale it starts off with you and your family and the people you let into your world. Your family will be part of various communities that will draw in others.

Jesus chose his small community of disciples one morning and starts out by teaching them in Luke 6. It says that a large crowd had gathered including people from all over Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon. Word had got out about Jesus and many came wanting to be healed.

It was a tough life in 1st century Judea with your land being controlled by the Romans, The Religious leaders making so many rules for people to try and keep, and the tax man taking liberties and demanding more money than they should. There were a lot of reasons for people to not mix, dislike and hate the people around them. In fact, groups of people were far more divided than they are today. Jews versus Gentiles, Jews against Samaritans, Zealots looking to kill Romans, Romans down treading the Jews, the Roman world suppressing Little Israel. Herod building his temple, Caesar building his empire, religious factions – Paganism against mono-theism. People certainly only hung out with those who they knew would give them a Christmas card!

But who was this Jesus, with this new teaching who had that special touch that special anointing! Some people assume that Jesus just taught easy, fluffy and lovely things but as we read today's scriptures, it's anything but!

Jesus goes for it – LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!!!! Not only love but do good to those who hate you.

That is incredibly difficult, don't you think? Have a think, who would be the last person you would invite over for dinner? An ex boss, a bully that bullied you? An ex-partner that hurt you? A person that betrayed you? That family member that hasn't said sorry? Alex Ferguson? Donald Trump? Who are you definitely not sending a Christmas card to this year?

To Jesus' listener they would have been taught an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth from the law given by Moses (Exodus 21:23-25). Yahweh was a God of justice and we, being made in his image demand justice too. It comes naturally from our created being to have some sort of moral code, a right from wrong. In this day and age we may argue over certain subjects, but ultimately we all get angry over what we believe is wrong. So the listener would have really found it difficult to accept the teaching that Jesus was giving and maybe this is a teaching that you have been struggling with.

Jesus wants to break this cycle, Jesus wants to help you and me, love those that don't love us.

Why? Because he came for everybody not just people in Churches, it's in our Great Commission to reach others, (Matthew 28).

Why? Because breaking this cycle means reaching out to the lost and hurting, potentially bringing groups of people that are detached, left out of society together. We are bridge builders. Notice in chapter 7 of Luke soon after this teaching that Jesus went and helped a Roman Centurion and what is more commended him for his faith "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." (Luke 7:9)

Why? Because we are to display the image of God, sons of the most high. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35 – 36)

Loving others who love us is no different to anybody else, even sinners do that. We won't get any credit for it as it's what we should be doing anyway. Jesus wants us to take things further, to go the extra mile for others, even our enemies.

Here are a few pointers that can help us as we consider how we can do this.

- God knows how we feel. No one said that what Jesus asks us to do is easy in fact you could argue that in some cases it's impossible. Look at some of the hatred in the world today! If you've been hurt or abused it's difficult but God understands how you feel and saw what you've been through. Even the darkest darkness is not dark to God. He saw everything but In the words of a very famous song, dear to me You'll Never Walk Alone! God walks with you.
- God doesn't want you to do it in your own strength. Try as hard as we might it may be humanly impossible to forgive and love our enemies. When the disciples once realized how impossible it is to reach God's standards Jesus simply says 'with man it is impossible but with God everything is possible'. This is the conclusion Corrie Ten Boon came to when she met a former SS Prison Guard responsible for so much suffering after the war. God and his peace is the only thing that will bring genuine peace. Ask him to help you in your walk with him, don't suffer

alone or go it alone. We should be filled with his Spirit and through his strength we can love and forgive.

- As we think about loving those who don't express care for us, remember have no expectations. Just send that Christmas card and bless someone. If you expect nothing back then you'll never be disappointed, and if you do get a response then that is a bonus. Remember your treasure is in heaven.

So, it's time to reflect and ask God to guide and lead us.

Who does God want you to reach out to as an individual?

Who does God want you to reach out to as a family?

Who does God want us to reach out to as a Church?

In what ways can we give our love and time sacrificially during this COVID 19 Outbreak?

Let's ask God to help us love one another.